

GARY LOCKE
Governor



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**Gov. Gary Locke, Agriculture Director Applaud
Breakthrough Potato Shipments to South Korea**

Locke's July 2002 Asia Trade Mission Credited for Landmark Deal

SEATTLE – Dec. 10, 2003 – Gov. Gary Locke and Valoria Loveland, director of the state Department of Agriculture, today announced the first-ever shipments of fresh Washington potatoes to South Korean potato chip manufacturers, a major breakthrough for Washington farmers.

To date, Hanjin Shipping has delivered 80 cargo containers and another 38 will leave the Port of Seattle this week for a total 118 containers carrying nearly 5 million pounds of potatoes. The agricultural deal is a result of Locke's trade mission to South Korea last year and work initiated by the Washington State Potato Commission and the Department of Agriculture.

"We have succeeded in opening the Korean market for Washington state chipping potatoes," Locke said. "This success shows how important our trade missions are in increasing and improving international trade. Our trade missions yield results. They create more opportunities for Washington farmers and businesses, and more jobs for Washington citizens."

Also joining Locke at the event were Pat Boss, executive director of the Washington State Potato Commission; Patricia Davis, president of the Port of Seattle Commission; Kevin Thaemert of Thaemert Farms, a potato grower from Quincy, Wash.; and Larry Hansen with Local 19 of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU).

"With help from Governor Locke's trade mission, the U.S. Potato Board and the Washington State Potato Commission, we have opened up a brand new foreign market and proven that the best quality potatoes are grown right here in Washington state," Thaemert said.

South Korea is Washington's fourth largest overseas market for food and agricultural products with sales of \$225 million last year.

“The Korean buyers say these are the best quality potatoes they’ve had,” Loveland said. “These sales were a year and half in the making with four trips to Washington by Korean buyers to check our farms, packinghouses and ports; and innumerable e-mails, faxes and phone calls.”

Loveland’s marketing staff helped initiate the effort to open this market. Last year, staff members assisted Washington food and agricultural companies with \$136 million in sales, generating about \$6 million in tax revenues and creating more than 2,000 jobs.

“For the past couple of years, the Potato Commission had envisioned that there would be a demand for chip potatoes in countries like Korea, Taiwan and Japan,” Boss said. “As a result of our continued efforts with Governor Locke, Director Loveland and our growers to educate Korean snack food manufacturers about the quality of our chip potatoes, we are seeing some good things happen.”

Every year Puget Sound ports export more than 14 million metric tons of agricultural products valued at \$6 billion. “Agricultural exports are a foundation of the state’s economy and the Port of Seattle’s cargo base,” Davis said. “Washington grown potatoes, in a variety of forms, have been an important export at the Port of Seattle for many years and with these shipments to South Korea, their importance grows. It’s truly a cause for celebration.”

Locke has led four Asia trade missions since 1997 to spotlight Washington’s agriculture, aerospace and high-tech industries.

Agriculture is Washington’s largest employer and its second largest industry after aerospace. Last year, the state’s farmers and ranchers produced \$5.6 billion in food and agricultural products. As these products are processed, transported and marketed to consumers, agriculture contributes \$29 billion, or 13 percent, to the state’s economy and provides jobs for 170,000 people.

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Related links: www.governor.wa.gov; www.agr.wa.gov; www.potatoes.com;
www.portseattle.org

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Note to editors: A [South Korea Trade fact sheet](#) is available on the state Department of Agriculture’s Web site.